




# 23







NATSUKI-KUN...



HAS A COLD?



I HAVE NO IDEA MYSELF,

WHAT KIND OF FOOD DO YOU GIVE TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE A COLD?

YEP.

SINCE MY APPETITE DOESN'T GO DOWN AT ALL, EVEN WHEN I'M SICK.

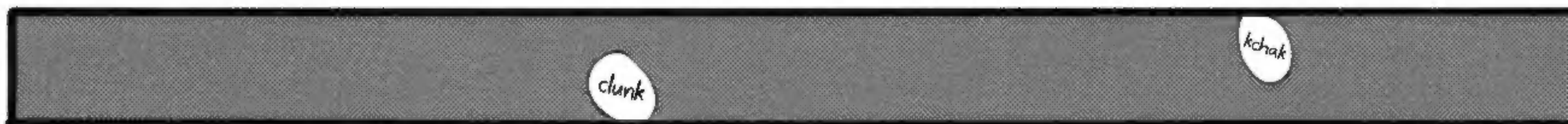
Oh yeah!

I remember one time, when you had a cold, you even asked for a second helping of katsudon.

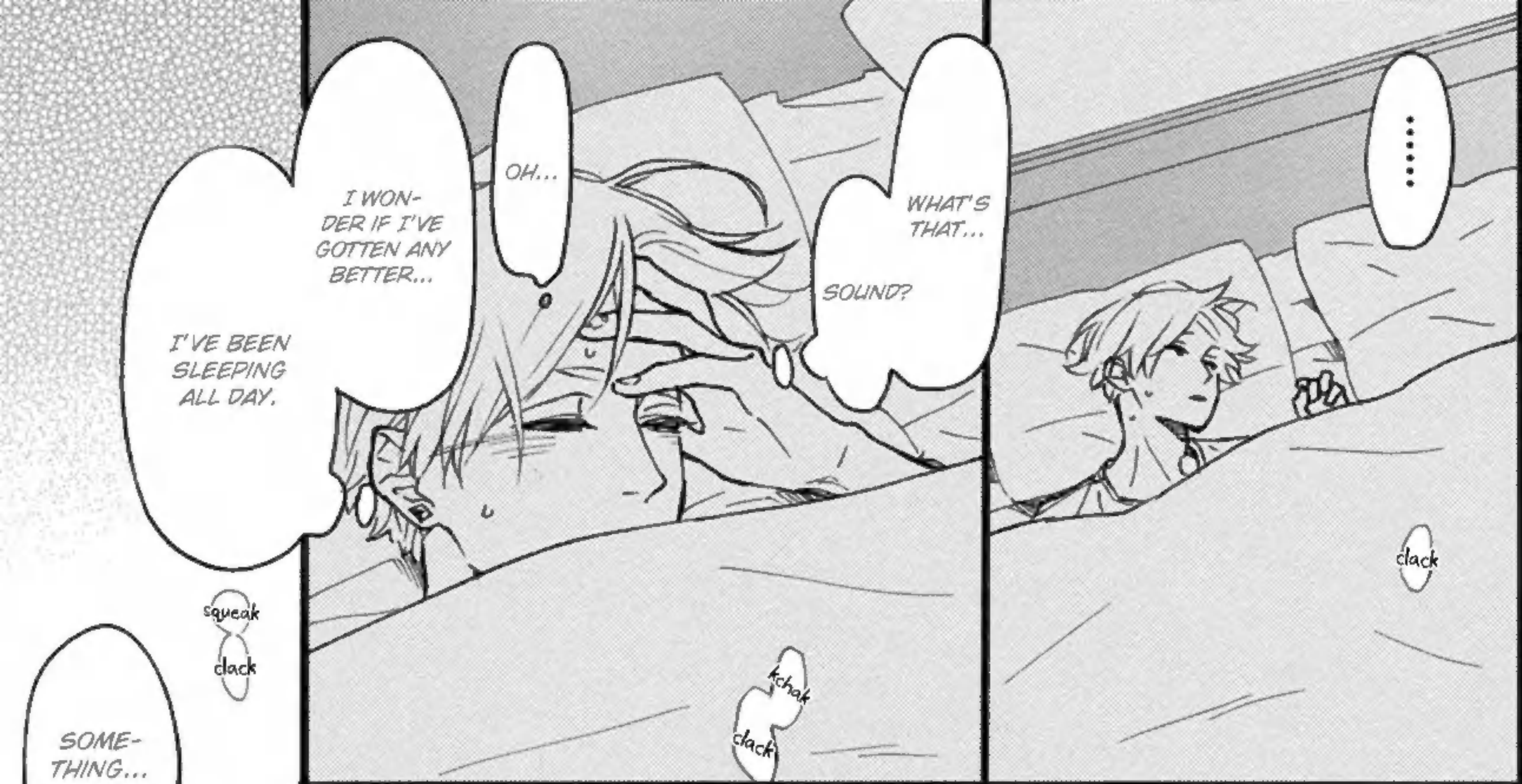
















stroke

squirm

YOU...?

MADE  
DINNER?

SORRY,  
DID I  
WAKE  
YOU?

NO...

THAT'S  
GOOD.

I MADE  
DINNER.  
CAN YOU  
EAT?

UH...

HOW  
ARE  
YOU?

MUCH  
BETTER.

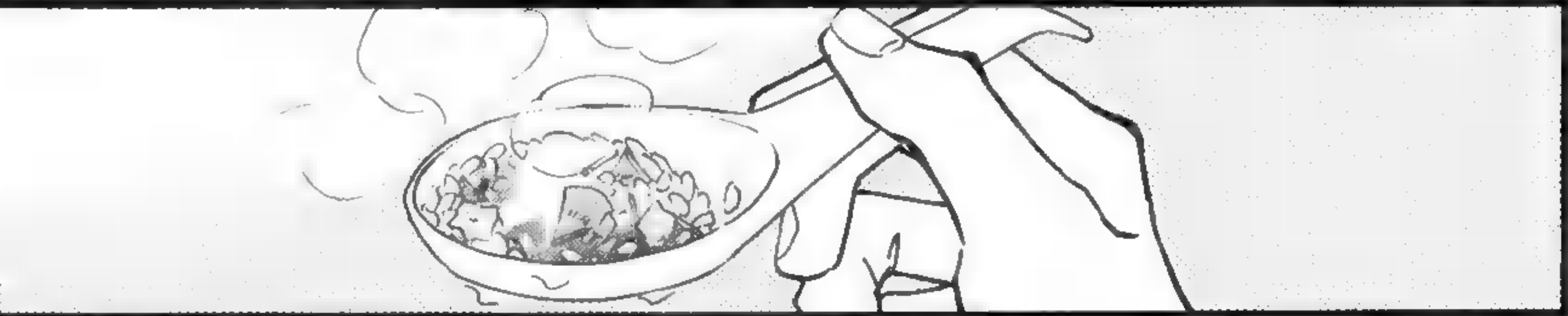




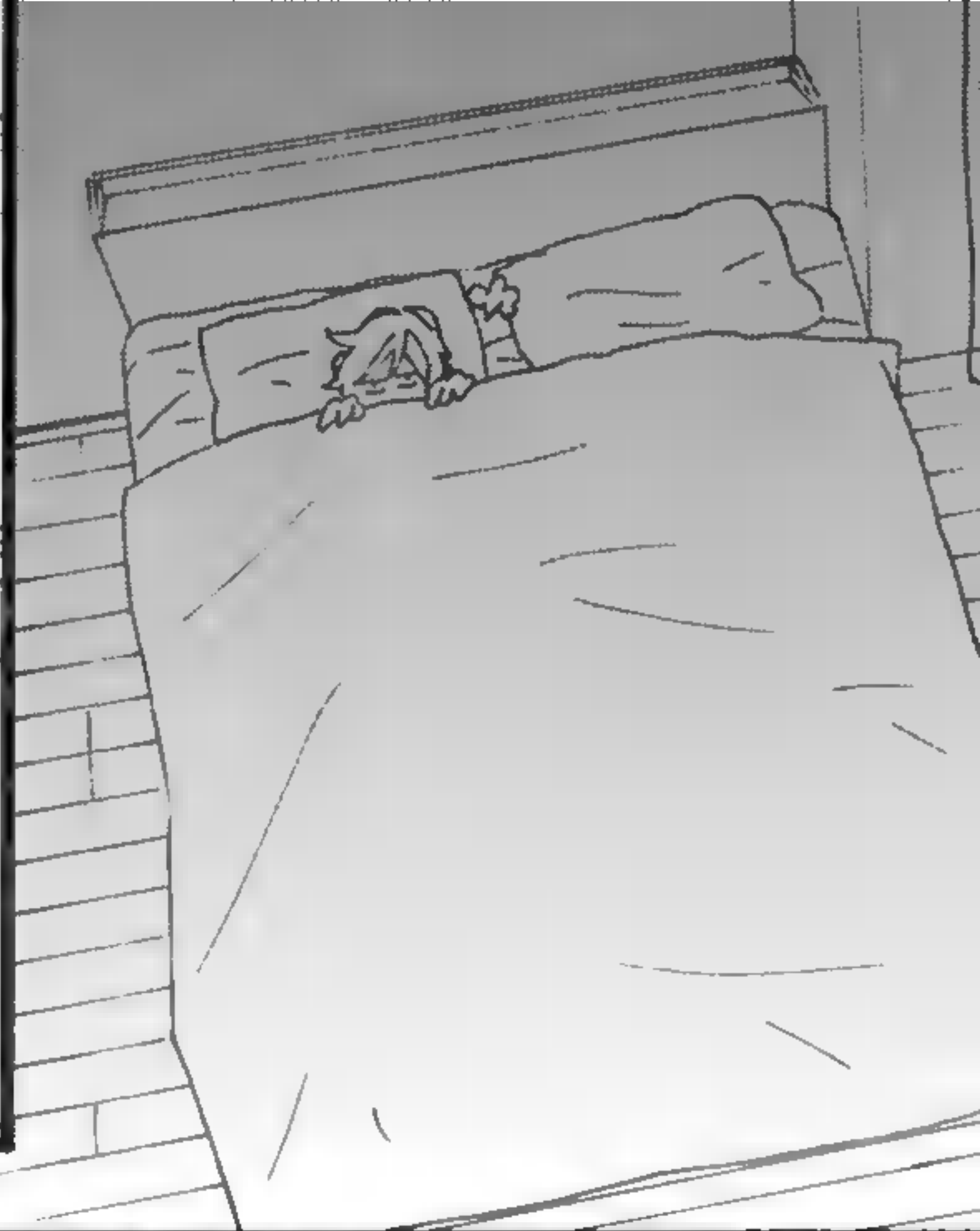




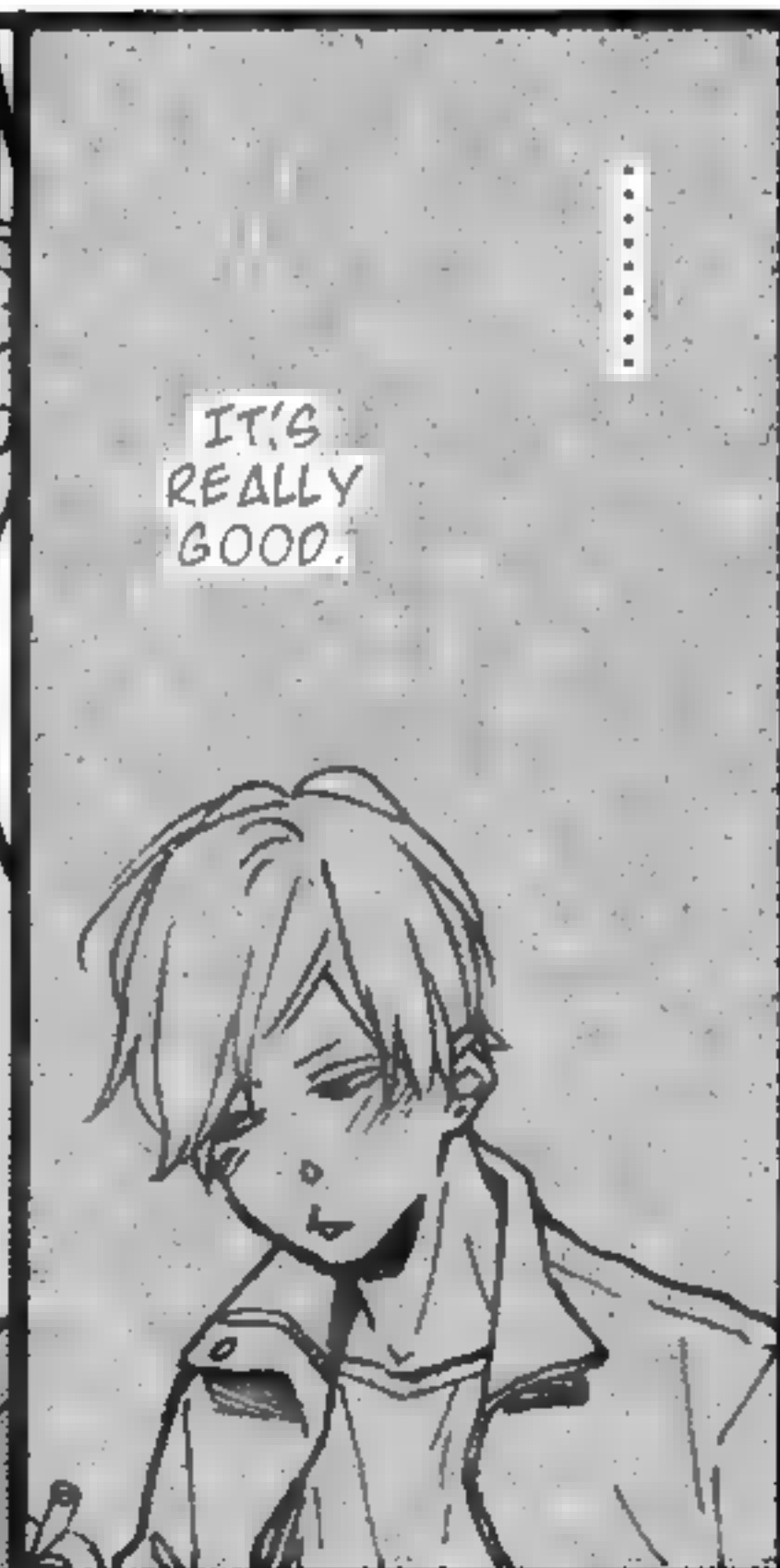
















DUNNO.

BUT...

WHY  
HERE?

THEN  
I DON'T  
MIND AT  
ALL.

I'VE BEEN  
FEELING MUCH  
BETTER EVER  
SINCE I ATE.

MY FEVER  
HAS GONE  
DOWN AND MY  
BODY DOESN'T  
FEEL HEAVY  
ANYMORE.

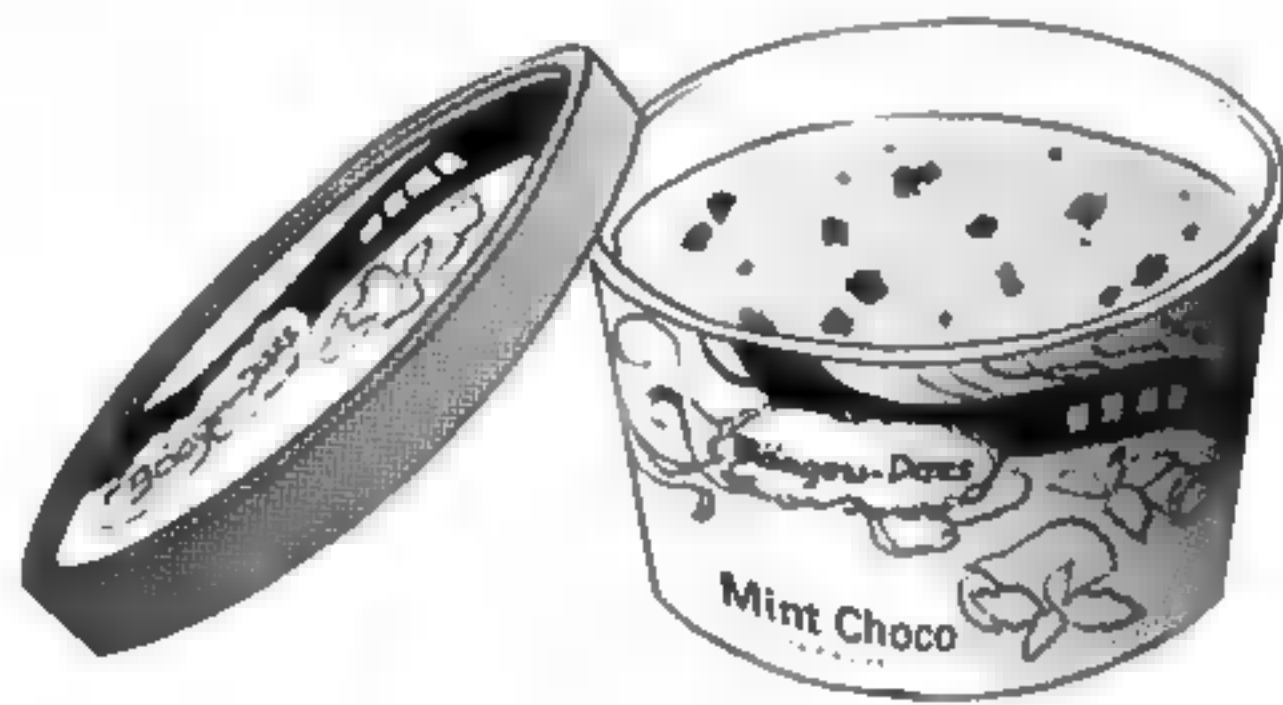
HOW  
ARE YOU  
FEELING?

BUT...

Bring some ice  
cream with you.



















...I'M NOT SURE THAT'S WHAT HE MEANS BY "YOU KNOW".

SOME-THING LIKE THAT,

"I have someone that I LOOOVE. And we're going out on a DAAATE!"

RIGHT?

OUTRIGHT STATING IT WOULD BE PRETTY EMBARRASSING.

BUT THAT'S JUST THE SIMPLE MATTER THAT...



IT'S NOT LIKE IT'S A SUBJECT THAT COMES UP THAT OFTEN SO...

YOU MAKE IT SOUND SO EASY, BUT IT'S STILL EMBARRASSING!

I THINK HE MEANS MORE LIKE SITTING OUR FRIENDS DOWN AND EXPLAINING.

I DON'T THINK THAT'S IT.

IF HE'S NOT ASKING WHY WE NEVER COME RIGHT OUT AND ANNOUNCE IT, THEN I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT COULD MEAN.

WAIT A SEC!

I DON'T CARE IF IT COMES UP ALL THE TIME OR HARDLY EVER. I'M STILL NOT GONNA SAY IT! BUT...

sniff

BUT?



uh

uh



WHAT'S UP?

HUH?!

WHY'D YOU MAKE HIM CRY?

WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?

NUH UH!

ME?!

uh

uh



I could easily  
surmise that,  
to those  
around me,

this was  
not natural  
at all...

I put quite a  
bit of effort  
into hiding that  
part of me.

I put so much  
effort into it,  
that I would end  
up exhausted, and  
above all else, I  
felt like I was  
drowning in  
unease.

And so  
finally...

Finally, during  
the course of  
a conversation,  
I let it slip to  
just a single  
friend that I  
thought I got  
along with  
pretty well.

This was  
back in middle  
school...

From  
a very  
young  
age,

I understood  
that liking guys  
was completely  
natural for  
me, but...





'S PRETTY NORMAL  
THESE DAYS.

I'M TELLIN' YA!  
'S NOT SO STRANGE.  
YA' SHOULD'VE TOLD  
MORE PEOPLE.

The next  
day, we had  
class...

YA' SHOULD  
THINK MORE  
ABOUT HARU-  
KAWA-KUN'S  
FEELIN'S.

YEAH,  
INNIT KINDA  
STRANGE FOR  
HIM TA' HANG  
OUT HERE?



HARUKAWA  
WOULD PROB'LY  
PREFER TA' HANG  
OUT WITH THE  
GIRLS.



CLASS  
MEETING

The next  
week, during  
school...

THIS OL' GRANNY  
DON'T HOLD NO  
PREJUDICES, SO  
DON' WORRY  
ABOUT IT.



HOPE  
YA' GET  
BETTER  
SOON.

I'D BE HAPPY  
TO LISTEN  
TO YA'!



YA' DON'  
HAVE ANYONE  
TO VENT TO,  
RIGHT?

TELL ME  
ANYTHIN'!

DON' BE  
EMBARRASSED!  
YOU CAN TALK  
TO US!

DON' WORRY!  
WE GET YA'!

That's all it  
took for it to  
spread through  
our entire  
small town.





I escaped to Tokyo as soon as I graduated.

spent a year figuring things out,

and then was somehow admitted into our university.

I had to keep my guard up at school constantly so as to not provoke any more interest.

They didn't bully or shun me but...

The overabundance of completely innocent misunderstandings kept coming until it was too much to take...

Even though they were all trying their best to understand me, I couldn't help but feel that they were against me and went into denial.



I WAS VERY CAREFUL ON HOW I ACTED AND HOW I SPOKE, SO THAT I WOULDN'T BE SEEN "LIKE THAT".

AND...

I TRIED NOT TO LOOK AT A PERSON AND THINK...

THEY MUST BE "LIKE THAT" EITHER...

BUT...

IN ORDER TO FIT IN,

I WAS CAREFUL AND...

DIDN'T GET TOO INVOLVED WITH ANY-ONE.





OH.

...A FEW NIGHTS AGO BY THE RIVERBANK, I JUST HAPPENED TO SEE TWO PEOPLE HOLDING HANDS AND KISSING WHILE ON THEIR WAY HOME.



YEAH. YOU WERE RIGHT. SORRY.  
We were actually seen.

SEEEEE!!!

And...  
I have...

"MIGHT EVEN BE OKAY TO TALK TO THEM..."  
"MAY-BE..."

"THOSE TWO COULD BE ALL RIGHT, MAYBE."  
SO I THOUGHT TO MYSELF...



really...  
need-ed...

uh  
to...  
uh

uh  
mm

to...  
talk...  
...







**HUU  
UUH  
!!!?**

WH-

**FLINCH**

Y-

NO, I'M  
SURPRISED  
TOO.

WH-

AND OUT OF  
EVERYTHING I  
JUST SAID, THIS IS  
WHAT YOU FOUND  
THE MOST SUR-  
PRISING?

WHAT'S  
SO SURPRIS-  
ING ABOUT  
THAT?!

LIKE...

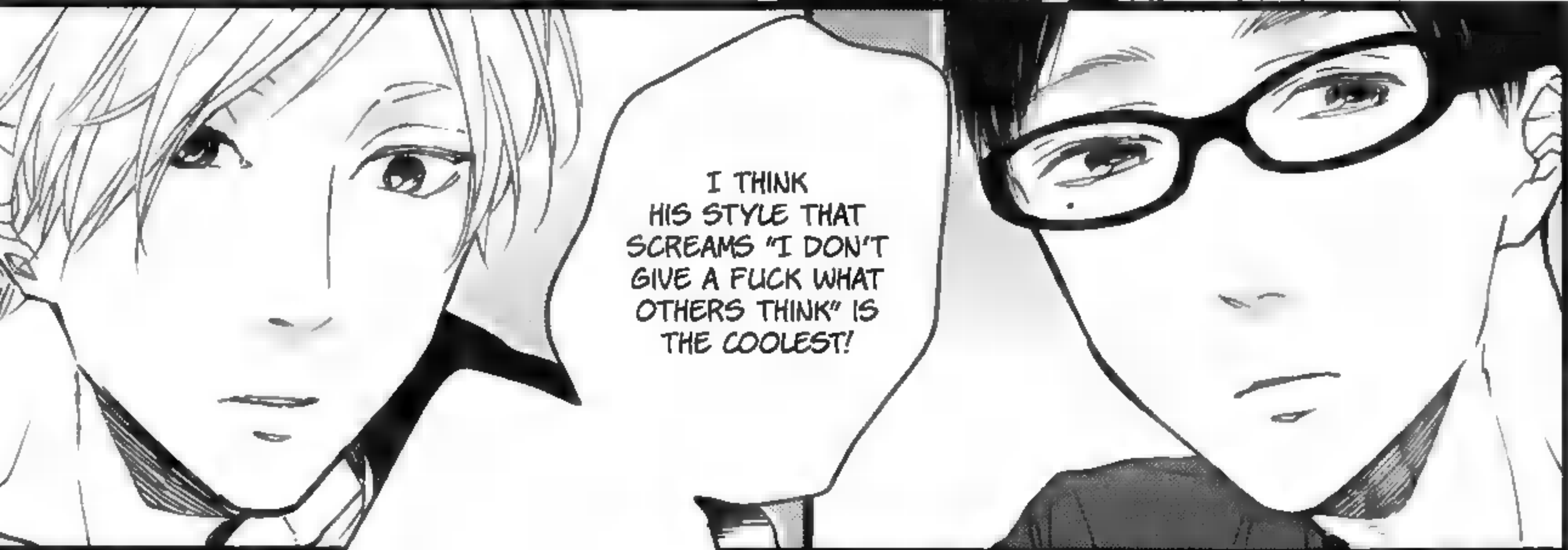
JUST...

**DUMBASS!  
I'M THE ONE  
THAT'S...**

You  
surprised  
me!

.....  
.....  
.....  
**HUH?!!**













NO PROB.  
THERE'S AN  
APP FOR  
THAT.

DO YOU  
KNOW HOW  
TO GET BACK  
FROM HERE?

RIGHT.



sniffle

DO YOU  
THINK WE  
COULD TALK  
AGAIN SOME-  
TIME?



AHHHHH,  
WEEELLLL...

OF  
COURSE.

IF YOU  
REALLY  
NEED  
TO...

RIGHT?



I'M REAL-  
LY SORRY FOR  
BARGING IN SO  
SUDDENLY,

WHILE  
NATSUKI  
WAS STILL  
SICK...

APOLOGIZE  
NEXT TIME YOU  
COME OVER.



"SO I  
WANT TO  
HEAR HIM  
OUT."

HE  
SAID.

HUH?

"TO GO  
AS FAR AS TO  
CONTACT ME, HE  
MUST HAVE SOME-  
THING HE REALLY  
NEEDS TO TALK  
ABOUT,"

...HMM?









IT WOULDN'T  
KILL YOU TO BE  
A LITTLE MORE  
HONEST WITH  
HARU-CHAN.

BEEP

BEEP

BEEP



pat

SINCE  
YOU HAVE  
FINALLY MADE  
A NEW FRIEND,  
MAKE SURE TO  
TREASURE  
HIM...

AFTER THE  
WAY YOU FACED  
OFF AGAINST HIM AND  
LOST AT THE SCHOOL  
ENTRANCE CEREMONY,  
I THOUGHT YOU WERE  
HOLDING A GRUDGE.

Don't know  
whaaaaat+++  
you're talking  
about~

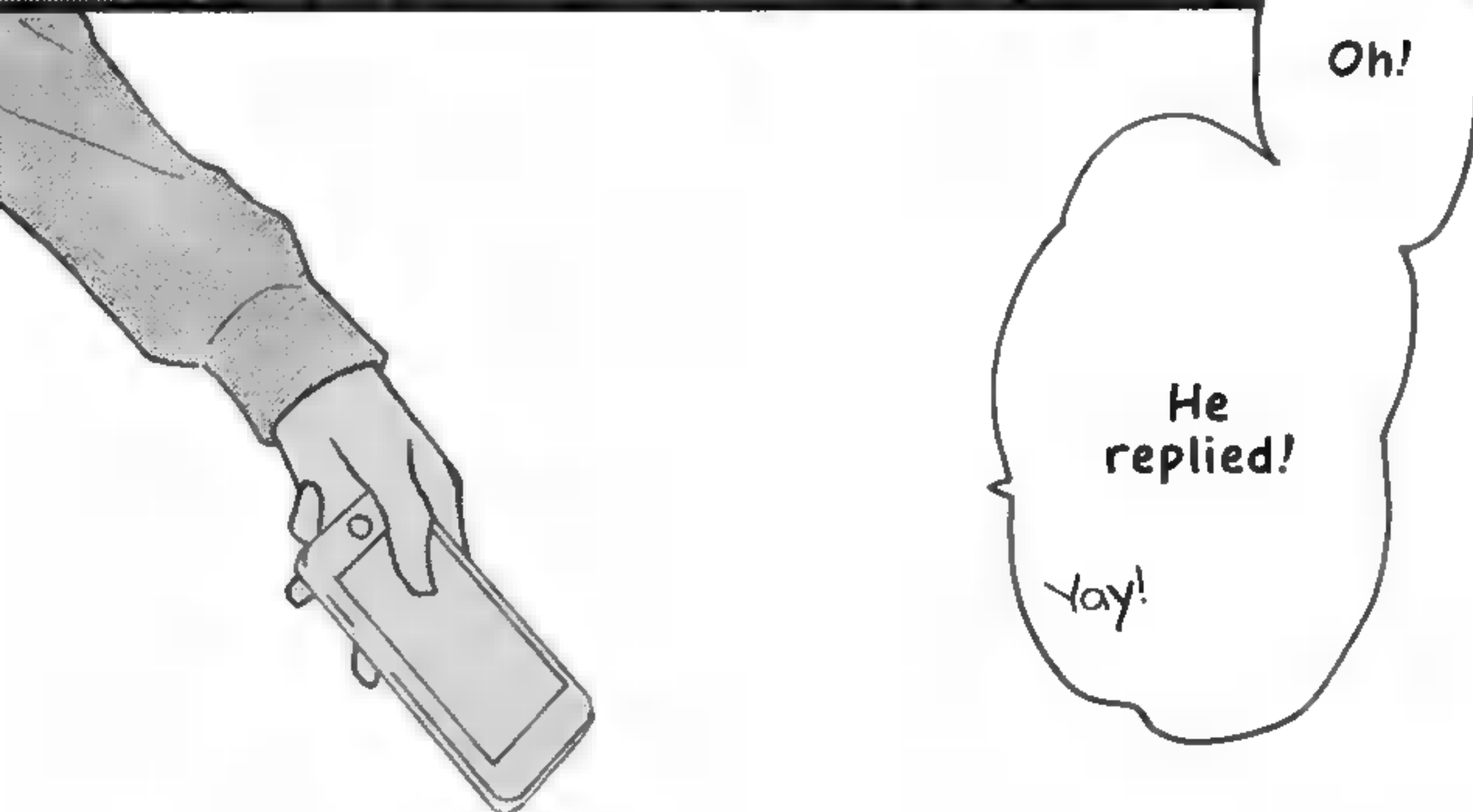
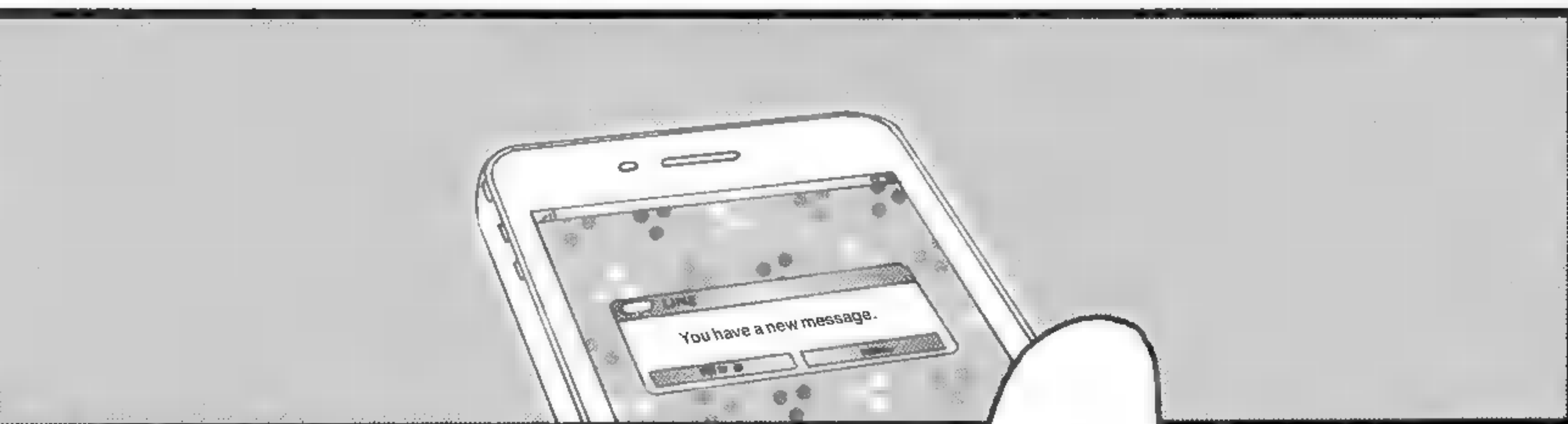
NEVER  
SAID I WAS  
HOLDING A  
GRUDGE.

YOU  
GOT IT ALL  
WRONG.













"PROBABLY,"  
HUH?

THAT'S  
GREAT!

HE SAID  
"IT PROBABLY  
CAME OUT PRETTY  
WELL."

YEP!

CHIKA?



HUH?

BUT  
REALLY...

THAT  
CHIKA...



THE ONE WHO  
I WORRIED WOULD  
NEVER TAKE INTEREST  
IN ANOTHER HUMAN  
OUTSIDE OF OUR  
FAMILY.

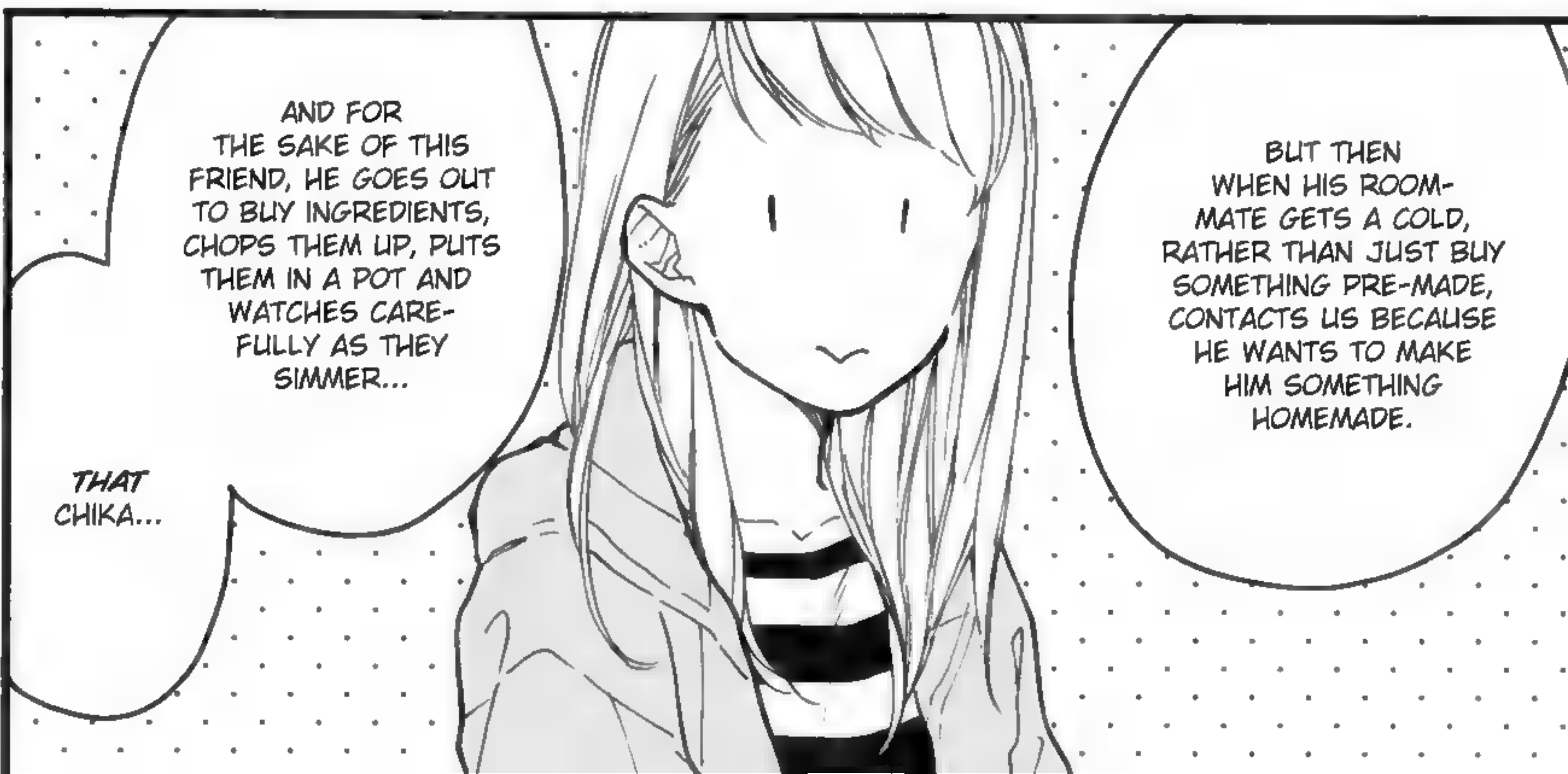
THAT  
CHIKA.

CHIKA,  
WHO NEVER  
ONCE ASKED ME  
TO DROP HIM OFF  
AT A FRIEND'S  
HOUSE.

THAT  
CHIKA.

CHIKA,  
WHO NEVER  
ONCE BROUGHT  
HOME ANY STO-  
RIES ABOUT  
FRIENDS...

CHIKA,  
WHO TO MY  
KNOWLEDGE,  
NEVER WENT  
TO A SINGLE  
FRIEND'S  
BIRTHDAY...



AND FOR  
THE SAKE OF THIS  
FRIEND, HE GOES OUT  
TO BUY INGREDIENTS,  
CHOPS THEM UP, PUTS  
THEM IN A POT AND  
WATCHES CARE-  
FULLY AS THEY  
SIMMER...

THAT  
CHIKA...

BUT THEN  
WHEN HIS ROOM-  
MATE GETS A COLD,  
RATHER THAN JUST BUY  
SOMETHING PRE-MADE,  
CONTACTS US BECAUSE  
HE WANTS TO MAKE  
HIM SOMETHING  
HOMEMADE.



I SHOULD  
HAVE ASKED  
HIM TO TAKE  
A VIDEO...

BUT HE  
PROBABLY  
WOULDN'T HAVE  
EVEN IF I  
ASKED.

IT SEEMS HE  
REALLY LOVES  
HIS YOUNGER  
BROTHER.

I am so  
intensely  
moved right  
now.

shiiiiiiiiine



HIS REPLY...





**STILL.  
HASN'T.  
COME!!**



Honestly, Kirara, weren't you complaining about how gross and boring he was the first time you met?

It's obvious he hasn't taken any notice of you at all.

And you said he was boring and barely talked, right?

Nuh uh! I would never say that...

Actually, I think I know when you flip flopped on this...

**ARRR-  
RRRR-  
GGGG-  
GGGG-  
HHHH-  
HHH!**



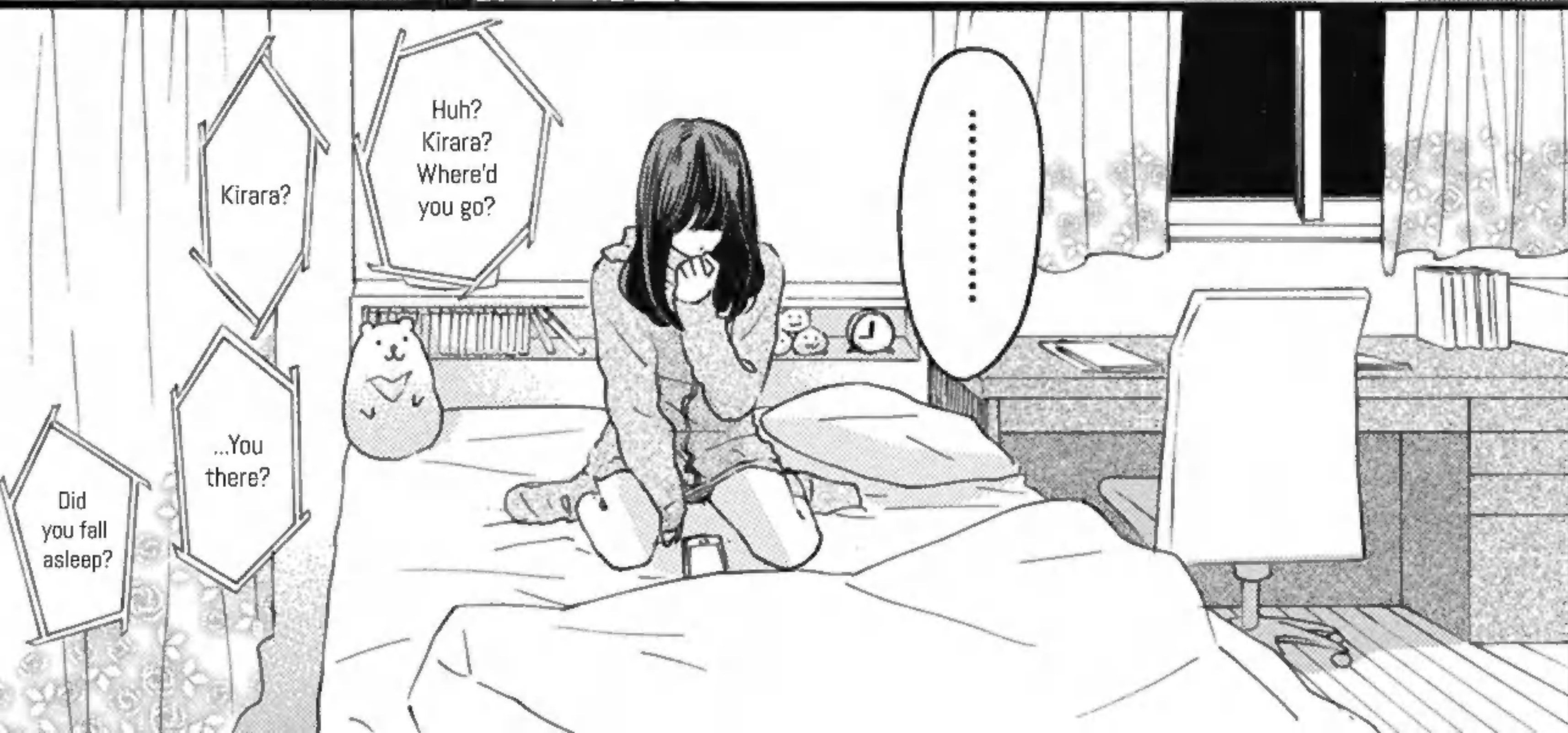
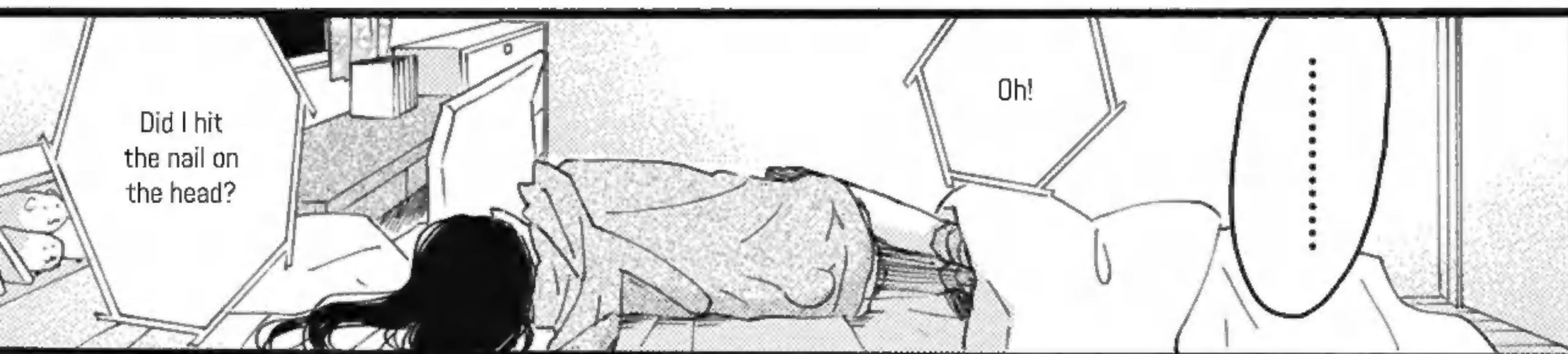
**BEFORE  
THAT HE WAS  
REALLY GROSS AND  
UNCOOL! AND HE  
STILL DOESN'T  
TALK!**

**'CUZ, NO  
ONE COULD  
TELL HOW HOT  
HE WAS BEFORE  
HE CUT HIS  
HAIR!**


Yep! That's it! You were suddenly like woosh! "He's not gross at all." You shocked us all.

It was back when we toured that college.









...GO SEE  
HIM!!

Oh! There  
you are!

Huh?  
What was  
that?



EEEEEEK!!

Go see  
him?

I'M  
GONNA...

Sure! Yeah!  
Why not? When  
are you going  
to go?